

The Saviour & The Hounds of Hell

A sermon delivered by

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Matthew's Gospel chapter twenty-seven. The verse of Scripture I would like to consider with the Lord's help today is verse twenty-seven:

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.^a

The twenty-second Psalm is a Messianic Psalm with a very interesting and instructive title. It reads:

To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David.^b

C.H. Spurgeon said of Psalm twenty-two, "We should read it reverently putting off the shoes from off our feet as Moses did at the burning bush. For if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this Psalm. Holy ground, indeed, for through it we find ourselves at that place where was heard that terrible cry, 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"

Those words came from the pen of David, but they also came from the lips of the Saviour as he hung there upon that cross on Golgotha's brow. Yes, David wrote the Psalm but he put a title to it that turns our gaze away from David and fixes our gaze on David's greater son – namely the Lord Jesus Christ. For the Psalm was to be sung upon Aijeleth Shahar. And what do those words mean? Aijeleth Shahar?

They mean, "The Hind of the Morning." A hind is a young deer. And David in this Psalm is writing about the Hind of the Morning. And since it is a Messianic Psalm he's writing about the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the Hind of the Morning. That's the title that David gives to him. You read through that Psalm – twenty-two – and you stand as an observer and you behold the Hind of the Morning being hunted and hounded to the point of death. He who is not only the Hind of the Morning – he is the Lamb

^a Matthew 27:27

^b Psalm 22:1

of God. He came into this world to take away our sins. And the Hind is being hunted by many.

Verse twelve reads:

Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.^c

Then the Psalmist speaks of the lions hunting the Hind of the Morning in verse thirteen:

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.^d

Still there is another group here designated as the dogs. Bulls compass him about. Lions hunt him down. Now we read about the dogs, verse sixteen:

For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:^e

Here is the Hind of the Morning speaking through David. Bulls have compassed me; the lions hunt me down; the dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me.

The wicked, wicked dogs have compassed him about. These dogs of wickedness have cornered him and now they claim him as their prey. Who are these dogs of wickedness? What is the identity of these hounds from hell? I believe their identity is given to us in our text.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.^f

It's as if the dogs – the dogs of wickedness, the hounds of hell – have laid hold of their prey and they drag him into their den – into the common hall. And their cries and their howls can be heard by others. For Mark tells us:

They call together the whole band [of soldiers]^g

As wild dogs when the howl after they have cornered the victim and then other dogs here the howling and they join them. And here we have the dogs of wickedness that the Lord Jesus spoke about in Psalm twenty-two: The dogs of wickedness whom I have called, “The Hounds of Hell.”

And I want us to consider this morning: “The Saviour & The Hounds of Hell.” The Saviour and these dogs of wickedness. Let us with reverence and solemnity look upon this terrible scene. Behold the Saviour and what these Roman soldiers did to the Lamb of God.

I want us – first of all – to consider the band of soldiers and the Saviour. Judas had traded Christ for thirty pieces of silver. The Jews had tormented him. Annas, Caiaphas and Herod and Pilate – they had

^c Psalm 22:12

^d Psalm 22:13

^e Psalm 22:16

^f Matthew 27:27

^g Mark 15:16

all tried him, found him innocent – but each one of them treated him as guilty. They had all had their turn at Christ. Now he is delivered unto the Roman soldiers. Now it is their turn. Now it is their turn to do their worst to the Hind of the Morning.

When they laid hold on him the summonsed the whole band of soldiers. How many was that? A band is the tenth part of a legion. A legion is made up of six thousand men. The tenth part of the legion is somewhere in the region of six hundred men. They called six hundred men to lead an innocent Lamb – who offered no resistance – to lead him to Calvary.

But it was still the early morning. They had seized him in the darkness at Gethsemane. They had rushed to judgment. They couldn't wait to get him to the cross. Still the darkness of the early morning and the Roman soldiers had plenty of time to do what they would to the Hind of the Morning.

I want us – first of all – regarding the band of soldiers and the Savior to take note of the place; the place where they brought the Saviour. We're told in our text:

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall,^h

Or – as it is written in Mark fifteen, verse sixteen:

The soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium;ⁱ

This was the soldier's quarter. This is where the soldiers would gather. It was an annex to the palace of Pilate. It must have been quite a large room when they were able to summons – bring in – six hundred men; bring in a whole band of soldiers. They dragged – like hounds the dragged their victim into their den. He who dwells in heavenly and ivory palaces now stands in a common hall as a common criminal surrounded by common Roman soldiers. And yet, dear child of God, does this not remind us of something? Does this not remind us that it was the common people who had been drawn to Christ during the days of his earthly ministry? For it was said of his ministry:

The common people heard him gladly.^j

The common people were attracted to him. It reminds us that his life was spent ministering to the common people. He was not ashamed to have as an earthly father a common carpenter. There was never any reluctance on his part to be associated with common fishermen. He never drew back from mingling with commoners whose lives had been ruined by disease and degradation, sickness and suffering. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the common man. If the Lord was not the Saviour of the common man this preacher would still be on his road to Hell.

Jude in his epistle speaks of how he has redeemed us with a

Common Salvation^k

^h Matthew 27:27

ⁱ Mark 15:16

^j Mark 12:37

^k Jude 3

It's a salvation for the common man – for that man or that woman who recognizes he or she is a sinner; just a common sinner.

Had Christ been reluctant to enter into the common hall and if it had have been his mind to do so ten legions of soldiers could not have brought Christ into the common hall. And he went willingly into the common hall. And if he had been reluctant to enter into the common hall of the Roman guard that day then he never would have entered into the heart of common man. To the heart of the common man there is no better than the common hall of the Roman guards. His entrance into that place.

And we notice the position of the Saviour. It is very evident what position the Lord Jesus took up in that hall with the hounds of hell around him. Look at the words:

[They] gathered unto him^l

There's his position. He's the center. He's the center; he's the focus of everyone's attention in that common hall. They have all gathered unto him. They haven't gathered unto Pilate or to Herod or to the elders or to the chief priests or the scribes. No. They've all gathered unto him. He's the focus of their attention. But there's something here that it would be very easy for us to miss. For he is not only the focus of their attention – he's the focus of their attacks. Because those words:

[They] gathered unto him^m

In the original they may be rendered – or read: “They gathered against him.” Not just gathered unto him. They were gathered against him. The whole band of soldiers that day was against the Lord Jesus Christ. And every one of them wanted their part in attacking the Son of God. Like wild dogs they all wanted to sink their teeth in him. They all wanted a part of the attack upon Jesus of Nazareth. Yet you ask the question, “Why? Why?”

Had they not heard Pilate say:

I find no fault in him.ⁿ

Had they not also heard him say:

This man hath done nothing amiss.^o

Then why were they ready to treat him like they did? They treated him as the worst of felons; the worst of criminals. Why did they attack him as they did? The answer is simple: Because he is Jesus of Nazareth; because he is the Son of God; and because it was in their nature to reject Jesus Christ. It was part of their nature.

^l Matthew 27:27

^m Ibid.

ⁿ John 19:4

^o Luke 23:41

Just, dear believer, this morning before the hour of our conversion it was in our nature to reject Jesus Christ. I tell you we were as guilty as the Roman soldiers were. No better. It was in our nature to reject Him.

The hounds of hell are still running loose today. You find them occupying many a pulpit across this land. For there are ministers in this land who will stand in their pulpits and they will attack the deity of the Lord Jesus. They will tell their people he was not God. He was a good man, but there are doubts regarding his deity. As far as we are concerned here today there are no doubts whatsoever. He is the Son of God and he's God the Son. But the hounds of hell today are still attacking his deity. You'll find them in the factories and offices of our land. Oh, you'll spot them immediately because they will congregate to mock the Christian in that office. And they'll congregate to laugh at that believer in that factory for no other reason – for no other reason than that that person is saved and he knows the Lord.

What other reason is there? Why is it that a child of God is singled out from all the others in that factory or in that office – singled out – and laughed at; made fun of. For no other reason than that person loves the Lord.

Why did they attack the Lord Jesus as they did in the common hall? For no other reason than because he is Jesus Christ; because it was in their nature to do so.

We despised the Lord as the Romans soldiers did. We did it once, too. Thank God for grace. Thank God for the grace that tamed us; the grace that transformed us; and the grace that ties us now in inseparable, unbreakable bonds to the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, how we love him today; this stranger of Galilee; this Jesus of Nazareth; this Lamb of God; this Hind of the Morning.

We love him, because he first loved us.^p

He was prepared to give himself to these hounds of hell and go to that common hall. Just as in that common hall every soldier focused his hatred on Christ; believer as we come to the Lord's house today and we come to this table by and by let us focus all our love on Jesus Christ. He deserves it.

And then I am struck here by the poverty of the Saviour. We're looking upon the scene I cannot help but look upon the poverty of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus became poor when he became man. He descended that long ladder of humiliation when he became man. When he was God manifest in flesh; when he took upon himself our nature but without sin – that's when he became poor – when he became man. And now he stands in the common hall we behold the poverty of the man.

The whole band of Roman guard was now against him there in the common hall. We see his poverty because one: he had no companions. He was alone in that common Hall. Where were his disciples? They were no where to be seen. When I come to study a passage of Scripture it is my practice to read over that passage again and again and again and again – a dozen, two dozen times. And as I read over this passage of Scripture again and again and again I felt as though I was standing there in that common hall. And the feeling swelled up within my heart that made me want to run into that common hall and

^p 1 John 4:19

cry, "Leave him alone!" I wanted to take a rod and beat back those hounds of hell and say, "Get your hands off."

But there was no one that he loved. We see his poverty. That man is poor that doesn't have a friend. That individual is poor indeed that cannot call some one their friend. Where were his friends? He stood in that common hall. He stood there alone.

See his poverty because he had no companions. See his poverty – he had no converts with him. Think of all the people that he healed. Where were they? Where were the lepers he had cleansed? The blind he had made to see? The lame he had enabled to walk? The deaf he had enabled to hear? The dumb he had enabled to speak? And the dying he had enabled to live? Where were they?

Why, if they all had come together their numbers would have made up an army and they would have been able to drive the Roman guard from the common hall; and would have been able to rescue the Hind of the Morning. But not one convert was to be found; not one who had been healed or helped by the Lord was to be found when the Roman soldiers cried for his blood. Behold his poverty.

Do you know that even it gets worse? His poverty deepens. I see him stand there without companions; without converts; and without clothing. For it says in the next verse:

And they stripped him^q

He who clothed the heavens with stars; he who told the earth with grass is without a garment to cover his own flesh. We were struck by the poverty of Paul when he sent word to Timothy to come and see him. He said to Timothy, "Bring the cloke. Bring my coat:

...and the books, but especially the parchments.^r

Poor Paul shut up in a prison without a coat to keep him warm; without a book to read; without a piece of parchment to write upon. Poor Christ: He stands before six hundred depraved men. He stands in his nakedness. He stands without a garment to cover his flesh. And I say today, "Behold the poverty of Christ." They made him a common vagabond. But I want us to remember something:

He was rich,...for [our] sakes...became poor^s

He stood in that judgment hall – in that common hall. He stood in the Praetorium in the midst of six hundred soldiers. He stood there in his nakedness and he did it all for us. He did it for you and he did it for me. Oh, the poverty of the Lord Jesus.

I want you to consider the behavior of the soldiers with the Saviour. As you read this passage of Scripture over and over again you cannot help but be touched by what the Saviour suffered at the hands of the Roman guards. Consider their treatment of Christ. The members of the Roman guard were no different in their treatment of the Lord Jesus than Herod's men of war. They were all soldiers. And how

^q Matthew 27:28

^r 2 Timothy 4:13

^s 2 Corinthians 8:4

did Herod's men of war treat the Lord Jesus? They put him in a gorgeous robe and sent him to Pilate. They set him at naught. Exactly as he said they would do. Mark nine verse twelve:

And how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at naught.^t

He knew it was coming. He knew he would be set a naught. What does it mean to be set at naught? The words mean to be of no importance – to be of no importance. As far as the Roman guard was concerned Jesus Christ to them was of no importance. He didn't mean a thing to them. As far as they were concerned he was no different than a common criminal.

I want you to recognize their mistake. They set him at naught. To them he was of no importance. But that was a terrible mistake for he is the Son of God. That makes him important.

[He is] the express image of his [Father]^u

That makes him important.

[He's the Creator of] Heaven and Earth.^v

He's the Son of Righteousness.

[He's the] Bright and the Morning Star.^w

That makes him important.

[He owns] the cattle upon a thousand hills.^x

And he owns the hills as well. He owns all the gold of Ophir and all the cedars in Lebanon. That makes him important. They were making a terrible mistake. He was of no importance to the Roman guard. But to you and I today who know him we can say, "He is my everything. He is my all. He is our everything."

For what are we without him? We're lost without him. We're poor without him. We're naked without him. We're dead without him. That makes him important to us. And he's the most important person in our lives. And he's the most important person in heaven. That Roman guard made a terrible mistake.

I not only see their mistake, but I see their mirth. You remember when the Philistines captured Samson and tortured him and put out his eyes; locked him up in prison. Then one day they went to the Temple of Dagon. They had a great feast. They were going to sing the praises of their god Dagon and they said, "Let's bring Samson. Let's bring Samson."

^t Mark 9:12

^u Hebrews 1:3

^v Genesis 1:1

^w Revelation 22:16

^x Psalm 50:10

Call for Samson, that he may make us sport.^y

And now it's not the house of Dagon. Now it's the common hall. And what the Philistines did to Samson the Roman guard is doing to Christ. They said, "Let's have some sport with Jesus of Nazareth. Let's have some sport." And so he becomes the butt of all their jokes; the reason for all their laughter. And they boldly venture to mock him the way they did because he stood in their midst as a Lamb and not a lion. That's why they mocked him. He offered no resistance.

They mistook his grace for weakness. And so they poured their scorn upon him.

But I notice also their madness. My, when you watch what the Roman soldiers are doing to the Lord Jesus you say in your heart, "They're mad! Look what they're doing to the Lord Jesus Christ – the one who gave them life; the one who breathed life into them." And there they are mocking the one – even the life giver himself. They pour scorn upon the one who one day would be sitting upon the throne – and it would be the throne of judgment. And six hundred Roman guards would stand before him and give an answer for what they did to Christ. They should have been doing what the Psalmist has exhorted us to do.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way,^z

When they saw what Pilate had done to him – scourged him, opening his back into rivers of blood – why they should have run forward and kissed him lest he be angry. But no, they mocked him instead.

Notice the tormenting of the Saviour. Because the Lord Jesus meant nothing to them they felt that that gave them a license to do as they pleased. Knowing that he claimed to be the King of the Jews then they mocked him with regard to that. I don't have time to go fully into the things that the Roman soldiers did that day. I can only highlight them for you. And you will find that there were seven things that they did to Christ. And each one of those seven things point us to what we are and to what Christ did for us.

They stripped him. That reminds us of the shame of nakedness that came in with sin. Adam and Eve stood before God after they had taken the forbidden fruit and they stood in the shame of their nakedness. Christ in the common hall stood in our place, clothed in our shame.

Secondly, they put on him a scarlet robe. They intended by this, of course, to make him a mock king. But we can see that there is a deeper meaning in their actions. For Isaiah chapter one verse eighteen says:

Though your sins be as scarlet,^{aa}

It was a scarlet robe he wore that day. And he wore that robe signifying his bearing our sins and our shame in his own body.

Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.^{bb}

^y Judges 16:25

^z Psalm 2:12

^{aa} Isaiah 1:18

Thirdly, they platted a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They didn't give him a crown of silver or of gold. This once again speaks to us of sin. For when our first parents sinned the ground immediately brought forth thorns and thistles. Thorns speak to us of the curse and the curse that sin brought upon the world. And there is Jesus Christ standing in the common hall wearing a crown of thorns – reminding us that he stood in the place of the curse.

Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:^{cc}

Fourthly, they put a reed in his right hand. Verse twenty-nine: This was intended for a mock scepter. They reckoned that a reed scepter was good enough for a mock king. But their craving for making sport with the Son of God had blinded them to the truth in the words of the Psalmist who said:

Thy throne, O God, [is] for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom [is] a right sceptre.^{dd}

Oh, they mocked him as no king at all. But the truth of the matter is:

[He is the] KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.^{ee}

And his kingdom is forever.

Fifthly:

They bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!^{ff}

Joseph's brethren scoffed at the idea of having, one day, to bow the knee to their brother. They scoffed and they wanted to put him to death. They made fun of him. When they saw him coming one day they laughed. They said, "Here cometh that dreamer."

Now, here's our Joseph. Here is our Jesus Christ and they bow the knee mockingly. Ah, but wait. The day is coming when they will bow the knee. And it will not be to mock him. The day is coming when Jesus sits in all his glory upon his throne and:

Every knee [will] bow...and...every tongue...confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, [is King and King of Kings.]^{gg}

Look again as we read in verse thirty:

They spit upon him^{hh}

^{bb} Ibid.

^{cc} Galatians 3:13

^{dd} Psalm 45:6

^{ee} Revelation 19:16

^{ff} Matthew 27:29

^{gg} Philippians 2:10,11

^{hh} Matthew 27:30

He already had spittles upon his face from those who buffeted him in the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest (Matthew twenty-six verse twenty-seven). Now the spittles rain down upon him again. Although it says here in our English version:

They spit upon himⁱⁱ

The tense of the word mean that they kept on spitting. It wasn't just the outrageous behavior of one soldier. They spat on him and they spat on him and they spat on him and they spat on him again. Oh, the indignity of it all. And yet the Lord knew it was coming. He prophesied through Isaiah:

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.^{jj}

Lastly, verse thirty:

They... took the reed, and smote him on the head.^{kk}

That which they had used to make him a mock king – and a mock sign of his kingdom and of his royalty; they took it and made it an instrument of cruelty. And once more, believer, it says they smote him. Like their spitting upon him, the tense of the words mean that they smote him and they smote him and they smote him and they went on smiting him. They smote again and again and again and again.

Surely it would make us all feel like crying out, “Leave him alone. That’s my Saviour you’re beating. That’s my Lord you’re spitting upon.”

Seven things. The treatment of Christ was complete.

But notice the testimony of the Saviour. Notice the testimony of the Saviour amidst all this – the spitting and the beating and the laughter and the jokes. I cannot help but notice his silence. Oh, the Roman guard – they cried out:

Hail, King of the Jews!^{ll}

And they all laughed, but the Lord stood there in silence. They tore his own garments off from him and put a rough Roman coat on him. They covered that back that was now raw. He stood there in silence. Every one had their turn at spitting upon him until the spittle of that depraved mob rained down his cheeks. And still he stood in silence. They took a reed and they beat him and they beat him and they beat him and they beat him again. And still not one word came from his lips.

I am reminded of the words of Peter. 1 Peter 2:23:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again;^{mm}

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{jj} Isaiah 50:6

^{kk} Matthew 27:30

^{ll} Matthew 27:29

And I'm reminded also of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

As a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.ⁿⁿ

What a testimony. His surrender. You cannot help but be impressed – yea, struck by the surrender of Christ – giving himself up to all that happened in the common hall. Who could have surrendered himself to such acts of cruelty and barbarity and not have retaliated? None but Jesus.

Who could have surrendered themselves to the beatings and the spittings without one word of protest? None but Jesus.

Who could have surrendered themselves the laughter and the jokes and the mockings without one cry of denunciation? None but Jesus.

I must finish here. I have another point, but I'll have to leave it.

I am struck also by his secret. You say, "What secret?"

You read those verses. In verse twenty-seven to verse thirty-one four or five verses contain a record of what happened to the Lord Jesus. It doesn't contain it all. We're told that Pilate scourged the Lord. How many times did he beat him with that whip? We don't know. What was his back like after he had been scourged? We don't know. It's his secret. What was he like as he stood there in nakedness? How did he feel? We don't know. It's his secret. How did he feel with those spittles streaming down his face? We're not told. It's not described to us. It's his secret. And what pain did he feel when they took that reed out of his hand and started beating him with it? We don't know. It's his secret.

And this we do know: That the Lord did it all for us. All that he endured; all that he felt; all that he suffered, the Lord look each one of us in the eye today and said, "I did it all for you." But it was only the beginning. That was only the start. He had yet to go to Calvary where he would be smitten of his Father and afflicted.

As we said at the beginning: The Roman soldiers concentrated all their hatred upon the Lord Jesus. Let us today as we come to this table concentrate all our love on the Lord Jesus.

We're told that when the Roman guard got to Calvary to crucify him they wouldn't rend his vesture. They didn't mind rending his flesh, but they didn't want to rend his vesture so they gambled for it. They thought more of his vesture than they did the Christ. And then we read sitting down they watched him there. And oh, what did they see? We'll leave that for another day. Let us today come to this table with the eye of faith as we sit down – let us sit and watch him here.

Let's bow our heads in prayer.

^{mm} 1 Peter 2:23

ⁿⁿ Isaiah 53:7
